

# THE VICTIMS' VOICE

## Winter 2017 Newsletter



### "Can you hear me?"

Several people have come forward regarding suspicious phone calls received. An unknowing victim answers the phone and is questioned with, "Can you hear me?" Are you the lady of the house?"; "Do you pay the household telephone bills?"; or "Are you the homeowner?"

The goal of this scam is to get victims to say "yes". The response is then recorded and can be used to further harm the victims by way of voice recognition. The best thing to do is hang up immediately and report it to your local police department. Other options are to ask who is speaking or how can I help you?

**QUESTIONS?**  
CONTACT OUR OFFICE

TOLL FREE  
1-88-771-3126

VISIT US ONLINE  
[WWW.CT.GOV/OVA](http://WWW.CT.GOV/OVA)



### Inside this issue:

#### MUAV

Cold Case Calendars

#### Tax Season

Identity Theft

#### CJPAC Subcommittee

Victim Issues

#### Share your event!

#### NCVRW 2017

Symposium

#### Meet the Staff

OVA Complaint Officer

...



The 2017 legislative session is underway and the OVA is closely monitoring bills that are proposed to ensure crime victims rights are protected. To date the OVA has submitted testimony regarding the following bills:

**SB 886:** An Act Concerning The Discretion to Grant or Deny Pardons for Juveniles Convicted Under Specific Conditions.

**HB 5441:** An Act Requiring Health Insurance Coverage for Long-Term Addiction Treatment.

**HB 6265:** An Act Concerning Pawnbrokers, Secondhand Dealers and Precious or Stones Dealers.

**HB 6282:** An Act Concerning Open Containers in Motor Vehicle.

**HB 6999:** An Act Concerning The Use of Therapy Dogs to Comfort Children Testifying in certain criminal prosecutions.

**HB 7003:** An Act Concerning Surety Bail Bond Agents.

**HB 7198:** An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services.

**HB 7216:** An Act Concerning Family Impact Statements in The Cases of Defendants with Dependent Children.

For a complete list of legislative language and testimony visit: [www.ct.gov/ova](http://www.ct.gov/ova)

## **Mothers United Against Violence: Unifying Efforts to Bring Families Closure**

Hartford, CT— Mothers United Against Violence (MUAV) is a faith-based organization that is the voice of hope for the Hartford Community bringing families spiritual support and advocating for justice.

In partnership with the Hartford Police Department, MUAV worked to implement a 2017 Calendar highlighting 23 unsolved murders in the city. 8,000 calendars have been printed and will be distributed throughout the community and in three state prisons. This project took months of planning and hopes to be a useful tool in solving cold cases.

Anyone with information on an unsolved murder case should call Hartford police's new tip line at 860-722-8477.



## **Tax Identity Theft**

Tax fraud via Identity theft is becoming a serious issue for many. Did someone misuse your Social Security number to file a tax refund? Was your child claimed as a dependent by someone else? Have you received calls claiming to be the IRS demanding money right away? Contact our office for more information or visit [www.identitytheft.gov](http://www.identitytheft.gov).

### **Victim Issues Subcommittee Reconvenes**

The Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission, (CJPAC) Victim Issues Subcommittee will meet:

Tuesday, March 21, 2-3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 18, 2-3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 16, 2-3:30 p.m.

Location:

Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
96 Pitkin Street, East Hartford

Subcommittee convened by State Victim Advocate Natasha M. Pierre and Laura Cordes the Executive Director of The CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.ct.gov/opm>



### **U.S. Superior Court Decisions Involving Juvenile Offender Sentencing**

Visit the OVA website at [www.ct.gov/ova](http://www.ct.gov/ova) to see a listing of inmates that are scheduled for a parole hearing under these new rules. Information will be updated as acquired and/or needed.



**Do you have an event that relates to  
victim issues you would like us to share?**

**Please contact our office today!**

**860-550-6632 - [ova.info@ct.gov](mailto:ova.info@ct.gov)**

# NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' ★ ★ RIGHTS WEEK ★ ★

## The Melanie Ilene Rieger Memorial Victims' Rights Symposium & Discussion

Are you a victim/survivor of a violent crime?  
Have questions? Need support?

The public is encouraged to attend this free event! Ask questions and join the  
discussion regarding Victims Rights and Services in Connecticut.

Thursday, April 6, 2017

Naugatuck Valley Community College  
750 Chase Parkway  
Waterbury, CT



Founders Hall Center for Health Sciences, Room 101

Please use East Entrance

7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Light refreshments will be provided. Free parking onsite.

For further information, please e-mail Dr. Samuel L. Rieger at [srieger243@att.net](mailto:srieger243@att.net)

The MIR Memorial Foundation was founded in memory of Melanie Rieger who was murdered by her boyfriend on May 24, 1994. It was created to support the needs of crime victims and survivors while working to educate the public and work together with other organizations to reduce violence in our communities.



# APRIL 2-8 ★ 2017



# Meet the Staff : Complaint Officer Merit Lajoie

Merit Lajoie has been with the OVA since May 2000. Her knowledge and experience in the areas of victim rights and victim services have proven invaluable to the agencies work. Ms. Lajoie herself is a survivor of homicide. Her mother was brutally murdered in 1996. Since her mother's tragic death, Merit worked diligently at the state legislature proposing gun restriction legislation that was later passed (P.A. No. 99-212).

## **What sparked your interest in working for the OVA?**

After the murder of my mother in 1996, I became very active in the Victims' Rights Movement, Survivors of Homicide, Inc. and the creation of the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA). In October of 1998, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, Thomas Ritter, appointed me to the Advisory Board of the OVA as the representative of a victim's advocacy group. I was honored when asked by the first State Victim Advocate to resign my position on the Advisory Board and apply for a position with the OVA. As with many victims/survivors, using a tragedy to create positive changes often becomes the new mission in life, as it did with me.

## **As the complaint officer for the agency, what do you feel is an obstacle for victims of crime in CT?**

The lack of enforcement of the rights of crime victims. Although we amended our state constitution in 1996 to provide crime victims with constitutional rights, the General Assembly has failed to advance the rights of crime victims and provide for remedies when a crime victim's right has been violated. While most of the criminal justice community has embraced victims' rights within the

criminal justice system, other factors, such as caseloads, judicial expediency and the plea bargain process, interfere with the full implementation of victims' rights in our system. Absent remedies to address alleged violation of a victim's rights, crime victims have no recourse when the system has failed them.

## **Where can CT improve as it relates to this obstacle?**

When the citizens of Connecticut amended its State Constitution to provide crime victims with constitutional rights throughout the criminal justice process, less than half of the states in the country had taken such action. Connecticut was considered to be a leader in the victims' rights field; that was 20 years ago. Unfortunately, Connecticut has fallen behind in the victims' rights movement, in part because of the lack of will to make the necessary changes to ensure that the rights of crime victims are more than words on paper. Interestingly, during this same period of time, there has been a societal shift within the criminal justice community with a concentration on offender re-entry/rehabilitation, elimination of mandatory minimum sentences, barriers to employment/housing of ex-offenders, bail reform and improvement to the pardons/parole process. In order for Connecticut to once again lead in the field of victims' rights, similar concentrated efforts need to be applied to advance the rights of crime victims and ensure that the rights are enforceable.

## **What would you want readers to know most?**

When you experience one of the most traumatic events in your life, whether it be the murder of a loved one or you

are the victim of identity theft, there is help available to you and you do not have to struggle alone. Often times I will receive a call from a victim after the criminal case is over and the victim has just learned of the available services and assistance. Connecticut requires victims to "opt-in" to the criminal justice system. This means that the victim must take certain steps to inform criminal justice agencies that they wish to be notified and informed. This is not easy for many victims who may be in trauma, unfamiliar with the criminal justice system, have concerns for their safety, have language or cultural barriers or simply do not even know where to begin. The OVA receives hundreds of these calls a year. The OVA will offer information and guidance as you attempt to navigate the criminal justice process and connect you with the direct service providers that can assist you along the way. In the event that there is an alleged violation of one or more of your rights as a crime victim, the OVA is available to assess the violation and work to resolve the violation with you.

## **Anything you would like to add or highlight?**

There are many great organizations in the state of Connecticut working on behalf of victims of crime. The state's lead agency is the Office of Victim Services (OVS), a Judicial Branch agency, which houses a clearinghouse of information for crime victims on the various services throughout the state.

